

# Brancusi and Gurdjieff

## Basarab Nicolescu and Paul Beekman Taylor

In his remarkable study ‘Brancusi et l’idée de sculpture’, Pontus Hulten wrote: “... it is notable that he met and spoke with men like Georges Ivanovich Gurdjieff,”<sup>1</sup> but Hulten offers no source for the fact. Other Brancusi scholars repeat the assertion, also without referring to a source. It seems evident to us that the source for this assertion must be Peter Neagoe’s *roman à clef* about Brancusi’s life.<sup>2</sup>

Peter (Petru) Neagoe (1881–1960),<sup>3</sup> an American writer of Romanian origin, was a close friend of Brancusi. In 1900 they were colleagues at the National School of Fine Arts in Bucharest. In 1903 Neagoe immigrated to the United States and took up residence in New York City where he married Anna Frankel, of Lithuanian origin, who died in 1985 at the age of 101. Neagoe became an American citizen in 1913, and returned to Paris in 1926 where he was acquainted with James Joyce, Ezra Pound, Gertrude Stein and Peggy Guggenheim, and where he rejoined his friend Brancusi. It was through Neagoe that Brancusi met Peggy Guggenheim.

Neagoe left Paris in 1939, but returned after the war in 1946 and 1949. In 1957, the Neagoes, who had acquired a studio in the Villa Seurat, were at the bedside of the dying Brancusi. It is evident that Neagoe had

---

Basarab Nicolescu is honorary theoretical physicist at CNRS (University Paris 6), Professor at the University Babes-Bolyai, Cluj -Napoca (Romania) and Honorary Member of the Romanian Academy.

Paul Beekman Taylor is Emeritus Professor of medieval English language and literature at University of Genève.

A French version of this text appeared in « Ligeia », Paris, n° 57-60 – « Brancusi et la sculpture », janvier-juin 2005, pp. 84-92.

<sup>1</sup> Pontus Hulten, ‘Brancusi et l’idée de sculpture’, in *Brancusi*, eds Natalia Dumitresco and Alexandre Istrati (Paris: Flammarion, 1995), p. 53.

<sup>2</sup> Peter Neagoe, *The Saint of Montparnasse: A Novel Based on the Life and Work of Constantin Brancusi* (Philadelphia and New York: Chilton Books, 1965).

<sup>3</sup> Mircea Zăciu, Marian Papahagi and Aurel Sasu, *Dictionarul scriitorilor români*, vol. M-Q (Bucharest: Albatros 2001), pp. 382-386.

intimate knowledge of Brancusi's life.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, how useful his book is as a source of facts of Brancusi's life is still an open question. Overall, critical circumspection is called for.

Complicating scrutiny of the text is the fact that Neagoe's book was unfinished at the time of his death. We do not know who added the subtitle *Novel based on the Life and Work of Constantin Brancusi*. Denise-Claude Le Goff, the excellent Neagoe's biographer,<sup>5</sup> explains: "Anna [Frankel] asked Beryl Becker to finish it for publication . . . In reading it, one notices quite a stark change of voice . . . and one can affirm without fear of error that the last chapters, from 32 onward, are not Neagoe's. The version of Brancusi's death, however, is taken directly from an earlier text 'My Recollections of Brancusi' that Neagoe wrote shortly after the death of his friend. It is equally clear that modifications have altered other parts of the work."<sup>6</sup> There are multiple errors of fact that have been identified by numerous writers on Brancusi's work. Furthermore, as Le Goff points out: "I have been able to find by chance, in the archives of John S. Mayfield, a fragment of the typed manuscript in which the characters carry fictive names. Who is to reveal their true identities?"<sup>7</sup> Considering current research on the life and work of Neagoe, the answer seem not to be forthcoming. Therefore, one might assume that the person who rewrote and completed Neagoe's manuscript invented relations between Gurdjieff and Brancusi. Considering, however, that the many references to Gurdjieff in *The Saint of Montparnasse* appear after Chapter 32, they may well be authentic. Furthermore, it is interesting to note that certain remarks made by Brancusi as they are reported in *The Saint of Montparnasse* echo remarks attributed to Gurdjieff by the Russian philosopher P. D. Ouspensky.<sup>8</sup>

The central female character of Neagoe's, Elaine Fayre, both demon and being of light, as has been many times remarked,<sup>9</sup> is a composite of the

---

<sup>4</sup> The papers of Peter Neagoe housed in the Library of the University of Syracuse show clearly the close ties between the two men.

<sup>5</sup> Denise-Claude Le Goff, *Peter Neagoe: l'homme et l'œuvre* (Frankfurt and New York: Peter Lang, Series XIX—General Literature, vol. 16, 1988). This book is based on the PhD thesis of the author: *Introduction à l'œuvre de Peter Neagoe*, Sorbonne, Paris, 1978.

<sup>6</sup> Le Goff, *Peter Neagoe*, p. 103.

<sup>7</sup> Le Goff, *Peter Neagoe*, p. 104.

<sup>8</sup> P. D. Ouspensky, *In Search of the Miraculous: Fragments of an Unknown Teaching* (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1949).

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Petre Pandrea, *Amintiri si exegeze* (Bucharest: Meridiane, 1967).

many women who counted in Brancusi's life of Brancusi, including Mlle Pogany, Vera Moore, Eileen Lane, Peggy Guggenheim, Baroness Renée Irana Frachon, Léonie Ricou, Princess Marie Bonaparte, Marcelle Valérie, Marthe Lebherz, Florence Meyer, Maria Chaliapine, Nouche de Gramont and the Romanian singer Maria Tanase.<sup>10</sup>

A distinctive personage in Brancusi's gallery of women is Romany Marie, a New York half-Gypsy half-Jew of Romanian origin<sup>11</sup>, who owned several famous tavernas in Greenwich Village. Romany Marie knew very well and Brancusi (she had a love history with him) and Gurdjieff. "Who is Gurdjieff? A few years more nobody will need to ask – says Romany Marie. His staff brought him to me the first time in the early twenties, a trip from Europe financed by Lady Rothermere of England, but he came often again in the later years. About twelve of them came that first time, brought to my little place by Muriel Draper and a whole group of other people".<sup>12</sup> It is very probable that Gurdjieff and Brancusi met in Romany Marie's taverna in New York.

Though among all the women identified by historians and who influenced Brancusi's life, none were Gurdjieff disciples, as we will show in the following pages, the situation is more complex that appears at first glance. A letter of introduction written for him before his arrival in France in 1926 by A. R. Orage, the most renowned English literary critic and editor-publisher of the first quarter of the century, it is certain that Neagoe himself knew Gurdjieff and visited him in Avon.<sup>13</sup> Neagoe had attended several of Orage's lectures and talks in New York City in which Gurdjieff's psycho-philosophical ideas were exposed. This fact has led us to research which, in the long run, has been fruitful in associating Brancusi with Gurdjieff. Documents, for the most part unpublished, which we cite below, demonstrate without any doubt that there was considerable contact, hitherto unrecorded,

---

<sup>10</sup> Nouche de Gramont, the Romanian Rada and a certain Marthe are three other important feminine figures in Neagoe's novel. Besides Brancusi, Elaine Fayre and Gurdjieff, other persons of note playing roles in the novel are Modigliani, Apollinaire, Marinetti, Rodin and Michael Romanov (who is certainly Neagoe himself).

<sup>11</sup> Romany Marie was the owner of the famous Romany Marie's Tavern in Greenwich Village, where came Theodore Dreiser, Buckminster Fuller, Mark Tobey, Stieglitz, Noguchi, Varèse, Duchamp, Brancusi, Gurdjieff and many others.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Schulman, *The Queen of Greenwich Village* (Louisville, KY: Butler Books, 2006), p. 138.

<sup>13</sup> Le Goff, *Peter Neagoe*, p. 107.

of Brancusi with Gurdjieff's teachings, if not with the man himself. We have no intention of claiming any sort of influence of Gurdjieff's ideas on Brancusi's art: Brancusi was too much his own man. But, the relations between two major figures of the twentieth century—Brancusi and Gurdjieff—merit elaboration.

Controversial as he was in his gruff and unconventional in appearance and behaviour,<sup>14</sup> keeping at arms' length with considerable brutality the curious, famous, notorious or otherwise, Georgi Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866/1872/1877?–1949) left behind a considerable corpus of work. His teaching and writings are notable in the domain of Psychology in reaction to Behaviourism, in music composed in collaboration with Thomas de Hartmann, in dance forms and in Cosmology.<sup>15</sup> Formulated in a modern occidental idiom, Gurdjieff's teachings have incited the interest of many renowned intellectuals in Russia, England, France and the United States. It suffices to mention the French great poet René Daumal,<sup>16</sup> Luc Dietrich, Pierre Schaeffer, René Barjavel and Georgette Leblanc, as well as two noted sculptors, Etienne Martin and François Stahly, and the English Aldous Huxley, W. H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood.

The Englishman A[fred] R[ichard] Orage was one of the most celebrated and influential disciples of Gurdjieff.<sup>17</sup> Owner and editor of *The New Age* in London from 1907 until 1922, he enlisted as contributors G. B. Shaw, G. K. Chesterton, H. G. Wells, Henry James, Havelock Ellis, Katherine Mansfield, Ezra Pound, Richard Aldington, John Middleton Murry, Wyndham Lewis, T. E. Hulme, Herbert Read, Edwin Muir, Llewelyn Powys, and many others of note, several of whom he 'discovered'. *The New Age* was notable particularly for defending women's rights and avant-garde art, as well as introducing its English readers to psychoanalysis. Ezra Pound wrote chronicles of art for the magazine over a number of pseudonyms.

---

<sup>14</sup> See James Moore's biography, *Gurdjieff: Anatomy of a Myth* (Longmead, Shaftesbury, Dorset and Rockport, MA: Element Books, 1991) and James Webb, *The Harmonious Circle: The Lives and Work of G. I. Gurdjieff, P. D. Ouspensky and Their followers* (New York: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1980).

<sup>15</sup> See *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*, eds Jacob Needleman and George Baker (New York: Continuum, 1996).

<sup>16</sup> *René Daumal et l'enseignement de Gurdjieff*, ed. Basarab Nicolescu (Ile-sur-la-Sorgue, France: Le Bois d'Orion, 2015).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Beekman Taylor, *Gurdjieff and Orage: Brothers in Elysium* (York Beach, ME: Weiser Books, 2001). See also the biography of Orage by Philip Mairet, *A. R. Orage* (New Hyde Park, NY: University Books, 1966).

In October 1922, at the height of his renown, Orage abandoned everything to join Gurdjieff at his Institute for the Harmonious Development of Man at the Prieuré in Avon-Fontainebleau. In December 1923, Orage sailed for the United States to introduce and teach the practical philosophy of Gurdjieff there. He founded groups for Gurdjieff study in several cities and, due to his prestige and rhetorical gifts, attracted American intellectuals, particularly in New York City.

It was in New York that Neagoe met Orage, and it is there that we can begin to track Brancusi. In her unpublished diary, Orage's wife Jessie Dwight (1901–1983) wrote for 21 February 1926 that she was with Brancusi on 21 February, accompanied by Stanley Nott, at the home of Mabel Dodge Luhan at Croton-on-Hudson, north of New York City, where members of Orage's group had assembled. Brancusi amused the group with tricks such as raising someone in the air with only two fingers. Before dinner, Orage gave a talk on Gurdjieff's philosophical psychology.<sup>18</sup>

Brancusi had arrived in New York 28 January 1926 and was living at the Brevoort Hotel. His personal exhibit was held at the Wildenstein Galleries between 18 February and 3 March 1926, and Brancusi left New York on 22 March.<sup>19</sup> If, less than a month after his arrival in New York, Brancusi had been able to meet Orage and Jessie and to listen to a talk on the ideas of Gurdjieff, it is clear that Brancusi knew Orage well in 1926 and showed interest in Gurdjieff himself.

It is interesting to note that the enigmatic pattern of "fatal pyramid" appears in the work of Brancusi for the first time on March 25<sup>th</sup> 1926 in a cover letter of the liner which brings him back in France.<sup>20</sup> In fact, the fatal pyramid seems to be an interpretation given by Brancusi to the Law of Seven of Gurdjieff's cosmology,<sup>21</sup> law which governs the decay of civilizations and the course of human actions. It is certainly Orage who had taught him the functioning of this law.

---

<sup>18</sup> The diaries of Jessie Dwight Orage are in the possession of Jessie's daughter-in-law, Anne B. Orage, who has given us permission to cite them. The papers of Orage are housed in the Special Collections Library at Leeds University.

<sup>19</sup> Hulten, 'Brancusi et l'idée de sculpture', pp. 171-172.

<sup>20</sup> Marielle Tabart, 'Œuvre graphique', in *Dation Brancusi: dessins et archives* eds Marielle Tabart et Doïna Lemny, (Paris: Centre Pompidou, catalogue d'exposition, 2003), p. 63.

<sup>21</sup> Basarab Nicolescu, 'Gurdjieff's Philosophy of Nature', in *Gurdjieff: Essays and Reflections on the Man and His Teaching*, pp. 37-69.

For her diary entry of 16 December of the same year, Jessie writes that she had visited (probably on the 15<sup>th</sup>) the Brancusi exposition at the Brummer Gallery that opened on 27 November and lasted until 15 December. Brancusi was present in New York during the exposition<sup>22</sup> and probably attended a “lecture” by Orage at Club 66 (founded by Alfred Stieglitz) afterwards.<sup>23</sup>

In the address books of Brancusi are the names and addresses of many of Orage’s followers in New York, including Muriel Draper, Jane Heap, Rita Romilly and Louise Welch.<sup>24</sup> Many of Orage’s groups met in the Murray Hill apartment of Muriel Draper, architecture critic on the staff of the *New Yorker*.<sup>25</sup>

Another unpublished biographical source can be found in the papers and oral testimony of Edith Taylor, the mother of one of the authors of this article.<sup>26</sup> Edith Taylor (1894–1974) was a lovely woman of predominantly Irish origin, (as were Elaine Fayre and Eileen Lane) with wit and intelligence. After arriving in Paris in 1914 and studying there after WWI service in the Morgan Hades Ambulance Company, she cultivated relations with Natalie Barney, Gertrude Stein, Kiki Vanderbilt, Djuna Barnes, Jane Heap, Gerald and Esther Murphy, Elsa Maxwell, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Man Ray and Marcel Duchamp, as well as with others prominent in the Paris art world. Edith Taylor had met Gurdjieff in London in 1922 and visited at the Prieuré in 1922–1923. Though she attended his talks in a number of places, she was never, strictly speaking, a ‘disciple’ of Gurdjieff. She had a personal relationship with Gurdjieff, nonetheless, which resulted in the birth of their daughter, whom Gurdjieff named Evdokia (“Eve” in French official records), after his mother.

Edith Taylor knew Brancusi well after being introduced to him by her close friend Dorothy Ireland, adopted daughter of Lady Rothermere, another friend of Edith’s.<sup>27</sup> At other times Edith met Brancusi in the company

---

<sup>22</sup> Hulten, ‘Brancusi et l’idée de sculpture’, p. 174.

<sup>23</sup> Jessie Dwight Orage, diaries, op. cit., entry for 16 December 1926.

<sup>24</sup> Archives Brancusi, Bibliothèque Kandinsky, Centre Pompidou, Paris.

<sup>25</sup> Louise Welch, *Orage with Gurdjieff in America* (London, Melbourne and Henley: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 50.

<sup>26</sup> Paul Beekman Taylor, *Gurdjieff and Toomer; Shadows of Heaven* (York Beach, ME, Samule Weiser, 1998).

<sup>27</sup> In an undated letter in the Archives Brancusi, Dorothy Ireland asks Brancusi, with whom she had a rendez-vous for dinner, to allow her to bring along Edith Taylor. In another letter in

## Brancusi and Gurdjieff

of Tristan Tzara or Marcel Duchamp. She was with Brancusi frequently in January of 1924, and sometime later drove him and Marcel Duchamp to the Prieuré to meet Gurdjieff.<sup>28</sup>

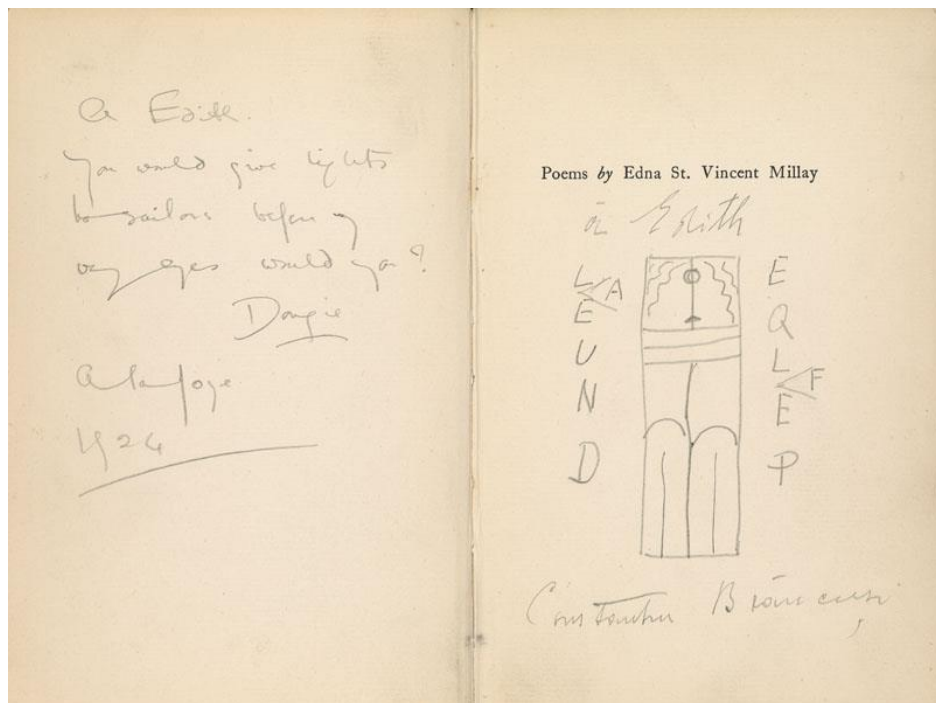


Figure 1 - On the right of the image: inscription of Brancusi written in January 1924 to Edith Taylor on the book *Poems* of Edna St. Vincent Millay. On the left of the image: inscription of Alan Ross Macdougall.

the same file, Dorothy sends Brancusi an invitation to dinner on the part of Viscountess Rothermere. The style of both letters suggests that Dorothy Ireland was close to Brancusi. One finds in Archives Brancusi three visit cards of Viscountess Rothermere. Lady Rothermere, who had supported Ouspensky and had given a substantial amount of money to Gurdjieff for the purchase of the Prieuré, at this time received guests at 33, Quai Voltaire.

<sup>28</sup> Edith Taylor's oral history related to her son Paul Beekman-Taylor, but without a precise date mentioned. In the winter of 1947-1948, in the presence of Paul Beekman Taylor in Wilton, CT, Marcel Duchamp reminisced with Edith Taylor about their trip to the Prieuré together, but no date was mentioned and whether or not Brancusi was with them on that occasion was not said.

We found in her archives a very interesting document: a drawing of 'The Kiss' made by Brancusi for her in the opening leaves of a newly purchased book of poems by Edna St. Vincent Millay,<sup>29</sup> a popular poetess of the day known for her tumultuous love affairs. Edna St. Vincent Millay met Brancusi in 1922.<sup>30</sup>

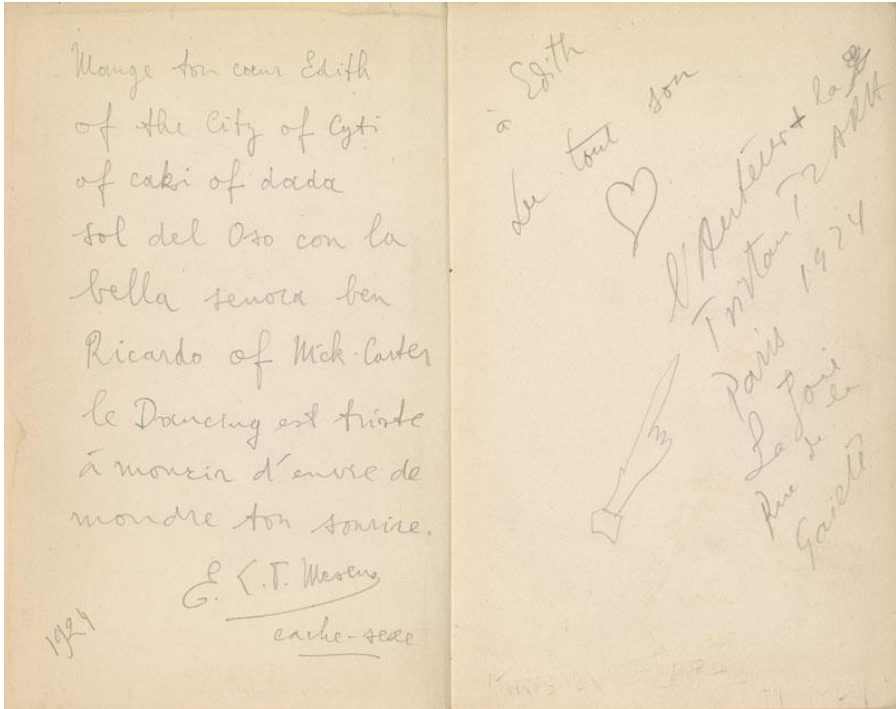


Figure 2 - On the right of the image : inscription by Tristan Tzara to Edith Taylor in the book *Poems* of Edna St. Vincent Millay by Tristan Tzara. On the left of the image : inscription of E. C. T. Mesens to Edith Taylor.

<sup>29</sup> Edna St. Vincent, *Poems* (London: Martin Secker, 1923). Archives of Edith Taylor in possession of Paul Beekman Taylor and Eve Taylor Chevalier.

<sup>30</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, letter of October 13<sup>th</sup> 1922 addressed to his sister Norma Millay, in *Letters of Edna St. Vincent Millay*, ed. Allan Ross Macdougall (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1952), p. 161.



To compensate Edith for the lack of an author's dedication in her copy, Brancusi, Tzara, Alan Ross Macdougall and E. C. T. Mesens, took it upon themselves to write dedications to her (see Figures 1 and 2). It is worthwhile noting that the motif of 'The Kiss' is, for Brancusi, "his second signature, his mark of love."<sup>31</sup> The code in Figure 1 recalls three other undeciphered enigmatic codes of Brancusi: the one of the medallion of 1923<sup>32</sup> and the two variants of the 'Symbol of Joyce'<sup>33</sup>—though they may be three distinct codes or three variations of the same one. We would opt for the last possibility.

Brancusi did nothing lightly. The least gestures and words had a sense. It seems evident to us that it was a question neither of a rebus nor of a Dadaist play, but of a message hidden in letters placed in correspondence with a symbolic design. Consequently, the letters and signs of punctuation must in themselves have a symbolic value. It is pertinent in this context to cite François Stahly's observation on Brancusi:

'He was very interested in esoteric matters. Above all, when I brought someone, he developed without fail his philosophy and bit as if he himself had invented all his evocations and philosophies. As he did, I had interests in Milarepa. He knew as well something of the Vedas. But he never cited his sources, they were always something he felt'.<sup>34</sup>

In December 1926, Edith Taylor visited the Brancusi Exhibit at the Brummer Gallery, twice with Jessie Orage and once with Jean Toomer, the celebrated author of *Cane*, who directed a Gurdjieff group in Chicago<sup>35</sup> but was in New York City awaiting Orage's return from the Prieuré. Toomer, Jessie and Edith were close associates at the time.

The testimony of Edith Taylor mentions also a meeting of Brancusi with Gurdjieff where they compared cooking skills. This may sound a bit strange but not unsurprising considering the vaunted culinary talents of the two men. Edith Taylor's testimony is corroborated by a passage in a well-known book by Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kultur*, in which Pound writes:

---

<sup>31</sup> Doïna Lemny, 'Les archives', in *Dation Brancusi: dessins et archives*, op. cit., p. 214.

<sup>32</sup> Marielle Tabart, 'Œuvre graphique', op. cit., p. 38.

<sup>33</sup> Marielle Tabart, 'Introduction', in *Brancusi & Duchamp*, ed. Marielle Tabart Pompidou (Paris: Centre Pompidou, Notebooks of the Atelier Brancusi, 2000), pp. 14–15. See also all variants of 'Symbol of Joyce' in *Dation Brancusi: dessins et archives*, op. cit., pp. 15 and 62.

<sup>34</sup> François Stahly, 'Souvenirs sur Brancusi', in *François Stahly: Ecrits et propos, Rémanence* 18 (September 2002), p. 17. Jetsun Milarepa was an eleventh-century Tibetan mystic.

<sup>35</sup> Edith Taylor's archives, note of December 1926. See also *Gurdjieff and Toomer: Shadows of Heaven*, op. cit., p. 116.

‘Brancusi ed. (could N.N.) cook on occasion and Gurdieff (sic) made Persian soup, bright yellow in colour, far more delicate—you might say Pier della Francesca in tone, as compared with a bortch (tinted Rembrandt). If he had had more of that sort of thing in his repertoire he ed. had he suspected it, or desired it, have worked on toward at least one more conversion’.<sup>36</sup>

This passage describes a gastronomical contest between Brancusi and Gurdjieff which Pound judged that probably took place in one of the two restaurants in Montmartre which Gurdjieff operated soon after his arrival in France in 1922. It is evident that Pound preferred Gurdjieff’s cooking—like paintings of Piero della Francesca—over that of Brancusi—like Rembrandt’s—but Gurdjieff’s culinary skills did not incite Pound to convert to his ideas.

One can wonder if the person of Edith Taylor influenced Peter Negoe’s fictive Elaine Fayre. The possibility is not out of the question. Nonetheless, Edith Taylor was not the only woman who was close at the same time to both Brancusi and Gurdjieff. Two other remarkable women, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap, central figures in the extraordinary artistic and literary movement of Americans in Paris in the twenties, are similarly involved.<sup>37</sup> Margaret Anderson (1886–1973) founded the legendary *Little Review* in 1914 in Chicago, and was joined in editorial tasks by Jane Heap (1883–1964) in 1916. In 1921 *The Little Review* published a Brancusi Number<sup>38</sup> considered by Dumitresco and Israti as “the event of the year for Brancusi.”<sup>39</sup>

---

<sup>36</sup> Ezra Pound, *Guide to Kultur* (New York: New Directions, 1970), p. 112. The ‘contest’ probably took place in the late summer of 1923.

<sup>37</sup> Andrea Weiss, *Paris was a Woman: Portraits from the Left Bank* (San Francisco: Harper, 1995). See also the biographical sketch of Margaret Anderson in Hugh Ford, *Four Lives in Paris* (San Francisco: North Point Press, 1987), pp. 227–86.

<sup>38</sup> *The Little Review - A Quarterly Journal of Art and Letters*, New York (Autumn 1921). Archive of Basarab Nicolescu. The review is published with a red streamer ‘Brancusi Number’. The magazine notes ‘Administration Margaret Anderson, jh (Jean Heap), Ezra Pound, Francis Picabia’. The number opens with a study ‘Brancusi’ by Ezra Pound containing twenty-four illustrations of Brancusi sculptures. Added to the contents is an insert where is written: ‘As PROTEST against the suppression of *The Little Review* containing various installments of the “ULYSSES” of JAMES JOYCE, the following artists and writers of international reputation are collaborating in the autumn number of Little Review: BRANCUSI, JEAN COCTEAU, JEAN HUGO, GUY CHARLES CROS, PAUL MORAND, FRANCIS PICABIA, EZRA POUND’.

<sup>39</sup> Hulten, ‘Brancusi et l’idée de sculpture’, 139.

Margaret Anderson's and Jane Heap's attachment to the teachings of Gurdjieff is well known and thoroughly documented. Margaret Anderson recounted her commitment to Gurdjieff in a memoir,<sup>40</sup> and Jane Heap gave up her literary career in 1930 to consecrate her energies for the remainder of her life to teaching Gurdjieff's ideas in London. It was Heap who later introduced Peter Brook to the teachings of Gurdjieff.<sup>41</sup> Between 1935 and 1939 Gurdjieff met regularly with a talented group of women, for the most part lesbians, the core of which was known as 'The Rope',<sup>42</sup> numbering among its associates Margaret Anderson, Georgette Leblanc,<sup>43</sup> Kathryn Hulme,<sup>44</sup> Solita Solano, Louise Davidson, Elizabeth Gordon and Alice Rohrer. Dorothy Caruso, the widow of Enrico Caruso, became associated with the group after the war, and Jane Heap joined them during her Paris sojourns. In effect, most of these women had been a member of a Gurdjieff group directed by Jane Heap in Paris before she left for London in October 1935.

*The Little Review*, 'Brancusi Number', suggested by Ezra Pound,<sup>45</sup> was published before Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap came into contact with the teachings of Gurdjieff in 1924.<sup>46</sup> The number marks the beginning

---

<sup>40</sup> Margaret Anderson, *The Unknowable Gurdjieff* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1962), dedicated to Jane Heap.

<sup>41</sup> Peter Brook, *Threads of Time : Recollections* (Washington: Counterpoint, 1998), pp. 60–61, 69–70, 75–76, 108.

<sup>42</sup> William Patrick Patterson, *Ladies of the Rope: Gurdjieff's Special Left Bank Women's Group* (Fairfax, CA: Arte Communications, 1999).

<sup>43</sup> Georgette Leblanc wrote a touching tribute to Gurdjieff in her book *La Machine a courage: Souvenirs* (Paris: J. B. Janin, 1947), with a preface by Jean Cocteau. Georgette was the life-long companion of Margaret Anderson and the two are buried side by side in Cannet, Var, in the cemetery Notre Dame des Anges. Georgette Leblanc was a friend of Brancusi, as attested by several documents from Archives Brancusi as, for example; her letter of 29 April 1926.

<sup>44</sup> Kathryn Hulme, *Undiscovered Country: A Spiritual Adventure* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1966). Her earlier *A Nun's Story* was made into a famous film starring Audrey Hepburn.

<sup>45</sup> *The Letters of Ezra Pound to Margaret Anderson: The Little Review Correspondence*, ed Thomas L. Scott and Melvin J. Friedman (New York: New Directions, 1988). See especially the letter of 29 April - 4 May 1921 in which Pound writes: "Have talked the year's issue over with Picabia. Features offered are BRANCUSI NUMBER (July) 20 illustrations, essay on the sculpture by E. P. [...] So that you are free to consider this lot as both a scoop and an honour. [...] I think it is perfectly solid investment for *anybody's* money."

<sup>46</sup> Margaret Anderson and Jean Heap had listened to Orage in New York in December 1923 and later, in January 1924, they witnessed Gurdjieff's demonstration of the sacred dances at

of a strong and fast friendship with Brancusi. After 1921, the date of the first visit to Paris of the two editors of *The Little Review*,<sup>47</sup> the three met on numerous occasions. In a well-known photograph taken in his studio in 1921, Brancusi is seen next to Anderson, Heap, Mina Loy, Tristan Tzara and an unidentified woman.<sup>48</sup>

In her autobiographical reflections<sup>49</sup> written in 1929, Margaret Anderson paints an extraordinary poignant portrait of Brancusi:

After dinner he brings out his coffee machine, grinds and makes a thick black Turkish coffee. Then someone always asks if he will sing and play his violin. Oh, we will see—later. *Si tout marche bien*. By which he means if everyone is completely relaxed and at home. Since every always is, he brings out the violin and plays folk songs with Rumanian abandon and the smile of a child. He sings to you in a soft timid laughing voice. He dances in his heavy sabots. He produces a small drum and makes Duchamp beat it. He dances wildly on the stone floor ... At midnight Brancusi decides to take flashlights. He becomes instantly as serious as if he were beginning a piece of sculpture. He spends an hour adjusting his apparatus to suit him. By one in the morning he decides that the night will be lost unless the party will spend it with him in the streets of Paris. Tzara suggests going to the Opera to tear down the statues and put up Brancusi in their place ... Brancusi leads the way through the streets. He stops at cafés where there is music, talks with everyone, drinks with everyone, dances in the middle of the floor. He is not in the least drunk. He is happy. By seven o'clock in the morning he has led you to the Bois. He lies down flat on the wet grass by the lake with the intention of catching a duck and taking it home to roast. He suggests taking a boat down the Seine to Rouen. Everyone refuses this. So he takes you instead to Les Halles for onion soup.<sup>50</sup>

It is interesting to note in this passage the name of Marcel Duchamp. Doïna Lemny observes appropriately:

“All those who knew Brancusi and wrote about him in studies and interviews speak rarely of Duchamp. Was he so discrete in his visits to

---

Lesley Hall, introduced by Gurdjieff himself. In the summer of 1924 both visited Gurdjieff at the Prieuré d'Avon.

<sup>47</sup> André Dalmas, 'Aventure et passion de Margaret Anderson - Little Review', *Le Nouveau Commerce*, Cahier 65/66 (Fall 1986), p. 104. The cover headlines 'Hommage à Little Review'.

<sup>48</sup> Hulten, 'Brancusi et l'idée de sculpture', p. 142. The same photo appears in Weiss, *When Paris was a Woman*, p. 199, in Serge Fauchereau, *Sur les pas de Brancusi* (Paris: Cercle d'Art, 1995), p.53, and in other books. Fauchereau speculates that the unidentified woman is Maya Chruszcz.

<sup>49</sup> Margaret Anderson, *My Thirty Years War* (New York: Covici, Friede, 1930). A superb full-page photo of Brancusi by Man Ray appears between pages 134 and 135.

<sup>50</sup> Anderson, *My Thirty Years War*, pp. 253 -255.

## Brancusi and Gurdjieff

Brancusi's studio? Only documents preserved in archives evoke this friendship."<sup>51</sup>

The published testimony of Margaret Anderson is an exception. According to Pierre Massot, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap 'adored' Marcel Duchamp:

"At times a rich American lady would lead us to the heights of Montmartre, to the Caucasian Château where grand dukes waltzed with Dollar Princesses, or to the Capitol. We were happy to see Brancusi tightly flanked by Jane Heap and Margaret Anderson, the two editors of *Little Review* who had published James Joyce's *Ulysses* and who both loved Marcel."<sup>52</sup>

In turn, Jane Heap adds corroborative testimony<sup>53</sup> in her letters addressed to Florence Reynolds:<sup>54</sup>

We found Tzara and spent the night in the Dome, Dingo and Select—at 4 A.M. we went hunting Brancusi in the Chauffeurs restaurant ... Last night was the 14<sup>th</sup> and Tzara, Brancusi and I went all over the place looking at Bal Mussettes—on the Ile St. Louis and in the old quarters of the town—later we came to the Styx and had cold chicken, wine, salad and cheese (at 2:30 A.M.)—the mobs are still dancing at 6:15 when we left to go home to bed.<sup>55</sup>

It was inevitable that these friends would have talked among themselves about Gurdjieff. In fact, Heap mentions the name of Gurdjieff in relation with Brancusi in a letter of 22 July 1925:

"Martie<sup>56</sup> and I went to Brancusi's Saturday night for dinner—Mme Picabia came in later. We stayed until 3:30 A.M.—ate too much, smoked too much, drank too much—laughed too much. Brancusi played and sang. Everywhere there is violent discussion of Gurdjieff—he does disturb the world—but I fear he's done for himself???"<sup>57</sup>

It is a pity that Jane Heap did not recall Brancusi's opinions during this 'violent discussion' of Gurdjieff.

After Chicago (1914–1916) and New York (1917–1927), Anderson and Heap moved *The Little Review* to Paris. In 1929, however, probably

---

<sup>51</sup> Lemny, 'Maurice et Morice: chronique d'une amitié', in *Brancusi & Duchamp*, p. 59.

<sup>52</sup> Pierre de Massot, 'Marcel Duchamp: Propos et souvenirs', *Etant Donnée* 2, 1999, p. 161.

<sup>53</sup> In a letter of September 8 1924 (Archives Brancusi), Jean Heap writes to Brancusi that it is impossible for her to return in New York without seeing him.

<sup>54</sup> *Dear Tiny Heart: The Letters of Jane Heap and Florence Reynolds*, ed. Holly A. Baggett (New York: University Press, 2000). These letters also contain numerous references to Edith Taylor who in August 1928 married Caesar Zwaska, Margaret Anderson's assistant at *The Little Review*.

<sup>55</sup> Baggett, *Dear Tiny Heart*, p. 105.

<sup>56</sup> Margaret Anderson.

<sup>57</sup> Baggett, *Dear Tiny Heart*, p. 114.

because of their growing involvement in the teachings of Gurdjieff, they decided it was time to make an end to their adventure with the magazine. So, in May 1929, the last number of *The Little Review* appeared in Paris with the names in it of Gurdjieff, Brancusi and Orage.<sup>58</sup> The number consisted mainly of responses to a questionnaire formulated by Anderson and Heap, and sent to important personalities and former collaborators of the magazine. The responses comprise an interesting document. Its ten questions are formulated in obvious Gurdjieffian fashion, intended to reveal the interior being of persons questioned. Examples are:

‘Why wouldn’t you change places with any other human being?’ ‘What is your world view?’ ‘Are you a reasonable being in a reasonable scheme?’ ‘Why do you go on living?’

With typical lucidity, Orage, who had suggested the questionnaire to Anderson and Heap in the first place, wrote:

‘I doubt whether you will get any sincere answers to these questions. After all, the stuff of the answers is the stuff of which “literature is the disguise”—and as your questionees are mainly literary, they will naturally preserve their private capital.’<sup>59</sup>

In effect, the greater part of those interrogated refused to respond, among them Einstein, Picasso, and Shaw, and others answered in banal fashion, insensibly or even obscenely. Tristan Tzara offered the same answer to every question. “Qu’est-ce cela peut bien vous foutre?” (“What the f...k does it matter to you?”)<sup>60</sup> Besides the forthright responses of Bertrand Russell, Jean Cocteau, Philippe Soupault, Aldous Huxley, Pierre de Massot, René Crevel, Emma Goldman, and George Antheil, it is not surprising that the most sincere responses came from those engaged in the Gurdjieff teaching: Margaret Anderson, Janet Flanner, Georgette Leblanc, Solita Solano, Caesar Zwaska, and the brothers Tom and Fritz Peters. Fritz, a young boy who had lived at the Prieuré since 1924, even cited Gurdjieff.<sup>61</sup>

The response of Brancusi is well known:

“Yes, yes. Je trouve questionnaire en arrivant au bout de monde. Je cherche un traducteur, si ce n’est pas trop tard. Donnez-moi un rendez-vous ou

---

<sup>58</sup> *The Little Review*, Spring Number, Paris (May 1929), archives of Basarab Nicolescu. Neither Ezra Pound nor Francis Picabia are listed in the administration.

<sup>59</sup> *The Little Review*, p. 65.

<sup>60</sup> *The Little Review*, p. 29.

<sup>61</sup> *The Little Review*, p. 66. Fritz and Tom Peters were nephews of Margaret Anderson. Her sister, Lois, could not raise the children, so they were adopted by Margaret and Jane Heap and brought to Gurdjieff for their education. Fritz’s account of his time with Gurdjieff is recounted in *Boyhood with Gurdjieff* (London: E. P. Dutton & Co, 1964).

passez me voir dans mes trois baraques. Vous embrasse affectueusement, Brancusi” (“Yes, yes, I find questionnaire arriving at the end of the world. I’m looking for a translator, if it isn’t too late. Give me an appointment or come by and see me in any of my three shacks. Kisses to you affectionately, Brancusi”).

Finally, either because he did not find a translator or because he considered, as had Orage, that it was unthinkable to expose to others his interior being in another place besides a monastery, Brancusi disdained from answering the questions.

After *The Little Review* folded, the trace of Brancusi’s relations with Gurdjieff, Orage, Edith Taylor, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap fades, but further scrutiny into the papers of Anderson,<sup>62</sup> Heap,<sup>63</sup> Solano<sup>64</sup> and Kathryn Hulme<sup>65</sup> might uncover some surprises.

In conclusion, we feel we have demonstrated that the relations between Brancusi, Orage and Gurdjieff are far more substantial than anecdotes or salon chitchat. Three women—Edith Taylor, Margaret Anderson and Jane Heap—substantiate those relations. Paradoxically, Peter Neagoe seems to have played no larger role than that of a scribe. The meetings between Brancusi, Orage and Gurdjieff would have been, after all, quite natural because all three were sculptors of soul, searchers for the Absolute beyond all religions and dogma. A remark by Benjamin Fondane is pertinent in this regard:

“Brancusi is a grand artist of the type “religious” [we would say rather ‘trans-religious’<sup>66</sup>]. He did not recognize as brothers those other than primitives, artists of the Gothic, Negroes. I know that this art is “finite”. But I know also that it has an “infinite””.<sup>67</sup>

In the present study we deliberately limited ourselves to expose the facts and documents proving the existence of an undoubtable of Brancusi for the

---

<sup>62</sup> The Anderson papers are in the Milwaukee Library of the University of Wisconsin with Brancusi materials in Box 5, Folder 17. Other Anderson documents are in private hands in London (Michael Curer-Briggs) and Providence Rhode Island (Mathilda M. Hills).

<sup>63</sup> Jane Heap’s papers are in the Florence Reynolds Collection in the Special Collections Department of the Library of the University of Delaware.

<sup>64</sup> The Solita Solano and Janet Flanner papers are in the Manuscript division of the Library of Congress in Washington D. C.

<sup>65</sup> The Kathryn Hulme papers are in the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University.

<sup>66</sup> Basarab Nicolescu, *Manifesto of Transdisciplinarity* (New York: State University of New York Press, 2002), translation in English by Karen-Claire Voss, pp. 125-129.

<sup>67</sup> Benjamin Fondane, *Constantin Brancusi* (Paris: Fata Morgana, 1995). The text was published earlier in *Cahiers de l’étoile*, II, Paris, 1929.

philosophy of Gurdjieff. It is obvious that our discovery can open a new angle of research – cosmological and spiritual – of the analysis of Brancusi's art and of his writings.

*Acknowledgments:* Basarab Nicolescu thanks Anne-Marie Zuccheli, Christine Jullien and Doïna Lemny for their aid researching documents at the Archives Brancusi. The papers of Edith Taylor are cited with the permission of Eve Taylor Chevalier, and the entries from the diary of Jessie Dwight Orage are cited with the permission of Anne B. Orage.